Parlier's Prospects:
Local Government's Role in Integrating Immigrants into Rural California Life

by

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Introduction

Taylor, Martin, and Fix observe in their introduction to **Poverty Amidst Prosperity** that the "Immigration and the Changing Face of Rural California" conferences have stemmed in part from a shift in interest to "immigrant policy", i.e. integration policy. This paper represents a modest and preliminary effort toward addressing some of the issues which arise in shaping integration policy – both practically and theoretically.

At the same time, this paper represents yet another plea for analytic methodologies which move away from sweeping macroeconomic analyses based on the extremely limited and flawed dataset of the decennial census toward micoanalytic approaches which look more carefully at the specific and unique circumstances shaping the development of rural California communities such as Parlier. The political reality is that policy decisions and implementation, like stock market behavior, have not only an empirical component, but also, a social or semantic component. Social policy must and, indeed, should address issues of "social meaning" consisting of individual and collective perceptions regarding the realities of social life, as well as changes in objective conditions.

It is important, also, to remember that researchers should, ideally, seek not only to abstractly understand, but, also, to contribute analyses which provide practical and explicit decision-making guidance to political actors. The question as posed by Taylor et al. "of what should be done for immigrants after their arrival to ensure that they and their children integrate successfully" has the virtue of squarely placing responsibility for immigrant integration on society at large. Yet, at the same time, it invites sweeping generalities and implies a certain passivity on the part of immigrants and a certain ambiguity about each group of players' respective contributions to resolving the challenges entailed in this effort. From a practical perspective, the actual policy and

planning questions which constantly arise relate to who should do what for whom and, it might be added, at what cost. Consequently, I give particular attention to the issue of what immigrants can do for themselves, what they currently are doing, individually and collectively, and what they might (in even a slightly better sociopolitical context) do.

Given an emphasis on immigrants' own actions in their own behalf, individually and collectively, the two clusters of practical considerations in integration policy which I examine are:

a) What are the constraints faced by small, rural California communities such as Parlier which seek to pursue a an affirmative "immigrant policy", that is a policy which is pro-immigrant and seriously seeks to achieve a fair measure of social, economic, and educational integration?

b) What policies and programs might make a positive contribution to actually empowering immigrants to effectively pursue social and economic equity? How are priorities identified and resources allocated among a host of competing, potentially promising efforts?

Key Definitional and Conceptual Issues

Here, and throughout the paper, the term "immigrant" is used somewhat imprecisely to refer to persons and families at very different points on the continuum of integration into California and U.S. society – from shuttle migrants through second and third generation children of foreign-born parents.

This imprecision is deliberate – because "immigrant policy" deeply effects not only individuals but, also, multiple generations within families and social networks. Thus, in principle, immigrant social policy must be formulated taking into account the different impacts such policy may have upon individuals within a single family, within each distinct U.S. community, and each transnational social/village network within each

community. These differential impacts, for example, play an important role in shaping attitudes on specific policy issues. Ironically, while immigration policy has addressed some aspects of the "vertical" or temporal dimension of immigration (albeit with a negative and narrow preoccupation with issues related to family preferences in the visa system), immigrant social policy has consistently been deliberately or shortsightedly inattentive to the tremendously complex implications of proposed policies on families of "mixed immigration status". Such shortsightedness has, for example, had very serious negative consequences in the much-touted California Healthy Families initiative, in CalWorks, and other purportedly "liberal" social policy initiatives, as well as in reactionary initiatives such as the anti-bilingual education movement.

The terminology of referring to multiple generations of immigrants and various patterns within a continuum of adaptions to binational life as "immigrants" is also useful in discussing Parlier. Within the pseudo-homogeneity of Parlier's status as an essentially "100% Hispanic" community, there is a rich social ecology of interactions among different social networks – defined "horizontally" or cross-sectionally in terms of family and migration networks yet, at the same time, modulated by position in the continuum of social integration. "Migrant farmworkers" are not one group; Texas-based migrants returning yearly to the Parlier Migrant Camp are in many regards very different from Oaxacan migrants who, just as regularly return for seasonal work. Even within a single migrant/extended family network, it is critical to remember that grandparents born in Michoacan may regularly babysit for the Parlier-born U.S. citizen children of their Michoacan-born son, Texas-born daughter-in-law, and arrange employment for the unauthorized spouse of their daughter-in-law's cousin from Calexico who shares their children's household. Within such communities, linkages/similarities and textures/differences must both be considered carefully.

Just as dialogue on immigrant policy tends to see immigrants in hard-and-fast "black and white" terms (i.e. as #'s eligible for X, Y, or Z program services), the general framework for discussion of social policy and, quite specifically, community development tends to look at distinct, and often opposing, compartmentalized entities –

federal agencies, state government agencies, local government, the non-profit, and the voluntary sector. In reality, there are important interactions among each of these supposedly distinct "domains" which when addressed in terms of capitalistic competition among different public entities (e.g. state vs. county, libraries vs. schools) are very likely to yield unanticipated and dysfunctional outcomes.

An extremely important issue for Parlier, for California's Central Valley in general, and, indeed, the entire state, which is only now beginning to be addressed is how the different degrees of Latino/Hispanic political representation – at the local, county, regional, state, and national level – affect policy debate and outcomes.[1] Clearly, policy formation is regularly shaped by "vertical networking". Just as the genesis of an anti-immigrant state initiative such as Proposition 187 lay in San Diego County local politics of the 1980's, and nativist groups at the federal level, pro-immigrant policy responses have vertical dimensions. For example, the current fight over federal guestworker legislation and what it means with regard to the Central Valley picture of "poverty admist prosperity" is, in some respects, a local conflict played out on a national stage.

The emphasis of this paper on the perceptions, goals, and strategies of civic leaders and others in Parlier can hopefully serve to shift us one small notch away from the preoccupation with macro-level abstractions – "immigration", "poverty", etc. to the reality that constant goal-oriented adaptation to current conditions by humans, their social networks and their social institutions, is a force as powerful as the many "invisible hands" of econometricians' regression models.

Parlier, a community which has been controlled by its immigrant residents – for more than 25 years now – provides an ideal opportunity to consider what can be achieved, acting aggressively and entrepreneurially within the "niches" of an

[1] For example, Puerto Rican representation in Congress, with federal representative such as Gutierrez, Serrano, and Lowry working collaboratively on issues of immigration and immigrant social policy have affected the outcome of key issues for the life of Central Valley communities such as Parlier – in the late 1980's post-IRCA adjustment issues and in the family unification compromises of last year.

sociopolitical environment which is, in fact, shaped largely by forces more powerful than those of a single small community.

Prospects for Parlier – Community Transformation in a Colonia

The work of Rochin and his colleagues (Rochin, Castillo, and Lopez, 1993; Rochin and Lopez, 1995) provides an extremely useful context for addressing the issues of immigrant empowerment. Parlier represents a paradigm case of a colonia as defined by Rochin and Lopez. Even as represented by decennial census data on "Hispanic origin" Parlier is 97% Latino; Rochin and Lopez report that it also has the lowest per capita county revenue of any of the 27 communities they analyzed -- $277 per capita. Like other such communities, it has experienced "white flight" -- actually "upper class" flight as well-off second-generationJapanese-American immigrants joined Armenians, and Anglos in moving outside of Parlier proper. From a historical and ethnographic perspective, Parlier is also a paradigm case of a colonia, with "West Parlier"/"La Colonia" having begun literally as a labor camp (Trujillo, 1978) and with the entire community continuing to this day as a "bedroom community" for transnational migrants (Runsten, Kissam, and Intili, 1995).

Yet, at the same time, despite its history of exploitation, in fact because of this very history, Parlier's local government has now been politically dominated by Latinos for slightly more than a quarter century (since the 1972 "political revolt") against Anglo, Armenian, and Japanese-American councilmen (among them the well-known figure of Harry Kubo representing grower interests). It is a "mature" immigrant settlement, with a settled population with at least one generation of locally-born Mexican-Americans, in many cases more. Thus, Parlier represents a useful opportunity to examine what immigrant empowerment can make possible and what constraints stand in the way of "full" immigrant social integration (which, presumably, would entail not only political equity but, also, social, economic, and social equity in relation to prevailing conditions in the society at large).

Parlier's successes, as well as its continuing challenges and problems, provide valuable guidance in considering what might be needed in order to formulate an optimal "win-win" strategy to promote rational social policy for immigrants to become integrated into the mainstream of U.S. life. Such guidance is crucial for California – because the demographic reality is that immigrants will inevitably be integrated into the mainstream of California social life. They and their children will be the mainstream of 21st Century California. The most pressing questions we now face relate not whether this shift will take place, or even when it will take place, but, rather, whether the transition will be smooth and rational or turbulent and painful.

In the following sections of this paper I highlight some of the most important consequences of Parlier's having achieved political equity while, at the same time, noting some of the constraints on its pursuit of what might be seen as some sort of approximation of a rational policy of immigrant integration.

1. Setting Priorities – Affordable Housing as a Priority

In our 1989-1990 research (Kissam and Griffith, 1991) we found that approximately 17% of Parlier residents lived in housing where they paid reduced rent or which was, otherwise, publically subsidized. This is, objectively, a remarkable achievement. The full story of Parlier's drive to build affordable housing is a long and complex one but, in summary, it presents a fairly straightforward example of the difference political power and political motivation can make. Parlier's Latino City Council (functioning also as Planning Commission and Redevelopment Agency) has been able to pursue, reportedly with very little internal controversy, an aggressive policy of developing affordable housing.

In the years since we conducted the Farm Labor Supply Study (FLSS) in Parlier, the first generation of housing efforts (including the unusual and innovative union-local government partnership to build the Rene Lopez estates and the Salandini Estates developments) have given to collaboration with private developers to build Manning

Estates, now in its seventh phase of development. With single-family dwellings being advertised "from $70,000 up", this sort of affordable housing project obviously represents an important benefit for immigrants as a population of "working poor" farmworkers and blue-collar employees – with housing costs falling into the $500-600 per month range, close to or below the rent paid by similarly economically and educationally disadvantaged families (either immigrant or native-born) in urban California. Parlier's City Manager observes with both pride that Parlier has satisfied the objectives of its housing element "for 6-8 years into the future" but also notes that it has also probably helped several surrounding communities meet their obligations to develop affordable housing. With private-public partnerships generating almost 500 new affordable housing units for a community which has probably grown from about 13,000 to perhaps 16,000 persons over the past decade this is, indeed, an impressive accomplishment.

Parlier is no longer simply an agricultural labor camp; it is now also a "blue collar" labor camp for workers commuting to jobs in Fresno. The newest local housing development now just getting going, Las Viñas Estates, will reportedly be selling homes in a slightly higher price range -- because of growing demand for "better housing" for an incipient middle class. This shift in focus from efforts to provide housing for very low-income families to low-moderate income families is interesting because it is not simply a response to "market demand" but a deliberate shift in municipal strategy to reflect the economic reality of a maturing "immigrant enclave" and Parlier residents' changing image of themselves. Yet even more deliberately, this shift in emphasis is seen as a means to stem out-migration by families which are economically successful. Parlier's strategic plan, for example, strongly emphasizes "re-diversification" and efforts to achieve a "balanced" community (as distinct from being a "rural ghetto" or "labor camp"); encouraging development of affordable housing for moderate-income families is, of course, an important element in this strategy, as well as a means of increasing city tax revenues.

Whereas the UFW-Parlier collaboration gave rise to perhaps the most prominent efforts of the first generation of affordable housing development in Parlier, the prevailing theme has really been one of pragmatic collaboration, even before such collaboration was in vogue. For example, there have reportedly been discussions in recent years with several farm labor contractors about public-private sector collaboration in building low-cost housing. These developments, while not fully in conformance with some images of a progressive social agenda, are important indicators of some progress toward integrating immigrants into the "mainstream" and, in fact, a way in which "small" local efforts can affect "big" social phenomena such as "the farm labor market".

The importance of Latino political representation in Parlier as an element in housing policy can best be appreciated by considering the situation in contrast to the situation in Anglo-dominated Central Valley communities such as Dixon (Solano County), Woodland (Yolo County), Galt (Sacramento), and Yuba City (Sutter County) where low-cost housing developments proposed by farmworker or immigrant advocates have been opposed doggedly by local residents under a "not in my backyard" banner. This opposition typically raises concerns about traffic, schools, or "neighborhood deterioration" as a result of developing more low-income housing. For example, Galt (despite having a Mexican-American mayor) opposed efforts to build farmworker housing, essentially arguing the absurd position that Galt is not technically a rural community. Recently, a homeowner's group in Dixon, for example, circulated a proposal asking the DIxon Planning Commission to study the first phase of a housing advocacy group's development for two years "to see how these people live" and complaining about inadequate space for garbage cans. Clearly, this sort of crypto-racist public dialogue is not feasible in Parlier.[2] The wages of this sort of "crypto-racist" opposition to low-income housing are most probably not the desired objective of improved quality of life but rather decreased quality of life in terms of inter-ethnic conflict down the road.

[2] I refer to this dialogue/opposition as "crypto-racist" because race words are no longer used, only words which refer to class, e.g. "these people".

Despite its strong emphasis on accessible and improved quality of housing, Parlier has recognized the sorts of problems faced by communities such as Shandon in Santa Barbara County (Haley, 1995) or Windsor in Sonoma County which have, from the perspective of local immigrant residents, become too attractive as destinations for rich, ex-urbanites. The Parlier strategic plan, for example, correctly identifies the challenge of maintaining "home rule" as follows, "How do we keep the 'home rule-participatory democracy of 71' while re-diversifying the community economically including incomes and housing?" Quite probably the current strategic planning emphasis on "balance" will need to continue to be a guideline as Parlier seeks to "progress" while avoiding the disasters of too rapid progress. In carrying out this agenda, Parlier faces a novel form of immigration policy challenges: how to nurture community diversification but to avoid the problems of having local institutions swamped by newly-arrived residents – arriving ex-urbanites, professionals and retirees.

2. Housing Regulation as an Element of Immigrant and Immigration Policy

Migration research is clear in portraying extended family and village networks as a key factor in maintaining Mexico-U.S. transnational migration networks. My colleagues, David Runsten and Anna Garcia, and I have stressed access to low-cost crowded housing as a key factor in decreasing the cost of migration from Mexico to the U.S. and as part of the risk-management strategy of transnational migrant farmworkers seeking to cope with the uncertainties of a labor market where underemployment is chronic. The availability of such housing in Parlier makes it what we call an "upstream node" for various transnational migration networks.

Access to low-cost crowded housing not only makes newly-arriving migrants' economic strategies feasible; provision of housing for migrants also generates substantial income for local landlords. Not surprisingly, for the many migrant farmworker landlords who are, themselves, farmworkers without access to Social Security or pension plans for retirement, such income is an important element in economic survival once they can no longer work.

Parlier seems to be akin to many communities in California and the Pacific Northwest in which the primary "engine" driving migration consists of extended family/village networks. In contrast to the "artificial support networks" maintained by many farm labor contractors and coyotes, extended family/village networks function in a relatively altruistic fashion, although both sorts of labor market intermediaries combine elements of mutual obligation and altruism with elements of exploitation. For example, in communities such as Parlier where extended family/village networks predominate, newly-arrived transnational migrants may be housed along with settled family members or in a "back house", in contrast to communities such as Immokalee, Arcadia, and Okeechobee in Florida, where what the predominant housing consists of "labor camps" of dilapidated trailers dedicated exclusively to housing recently-arrived migrants, usually unaccompanied males.

The crucial difference between communities we have studied such as Parlier and Immokalee seems to lie not in differences in the proportion of transnational migrants in the labor market or in prevailing charges for rent, but, rather, in the proportion of absentee landlords, in social attitudes regarding migrants, and in local government's role in housing regulation. In communities such as Arcadia, for example, trailers for migrants are concentrated on the outskirts of town; the city council's response to this "blight" was to pass a zoning ordinance prohibiting shared housing by unrelated individuals in order to assure that migrants not invade the (predominantly White and African-American) center of town and to assure that enforcement of housing standards be the county's responsibility. In Immokalee, efforts to incorporate the community have always been defeated, presumably to maintain county non-enforcement of housing codes. As a result, housing regulation is virtually non-existent.

Parlier, very interestingly, has articulated a housing regulation policy which formally replicates informal social principles prevailing in family/village networks by permitting additional housing units for extended family members but not for unrelated renters (i.e. unaccompanied male migrants). This is loosely enforced. The result is that,

while there are many instances in which housing is, in fact, provided, to groups of unaccompanied males and other unrelated transnational migrants, the quality of this crowded housing is noticeably better than in many other communities since the informal practice is to pursue some of the most egregious cases of sub-standard housing while giving little to technical violations of the local housing ordinance. Clearly, there are political, legal, and practical difficulties involved in maintaining such a "balanced" housing enforcement policy but, arguably, the result has been to respond to demands from agricultural employers, landlords, and transnational migrants for access to low-cost crowded housing while avoiding the worst problems of neighborhood deterioration which can be seen in communities as diverse as Immokalee, FL, El Paso, TX, and Los Angeles.[3]

As in the colonias of the Rio Grande Valley where there is extensive poverty but "socially integrated" neighborhoods, Parlier's success in pursuing a high quality of community life seems to hinge in part on having achieved a housing mix in which settled long-term immigrants live side-by-side with transnational migrants. As the research by Wilson and others recognizes, one facet of the very serious problems faced by "underclass" neighborhoods is their residential segregation and the political reality that the community institutions in such areas can be more or less abandoned by the rest of the system. Thus, Parlier has succeeded in a realm seldom addressed by public policy analysts, namely by retaining "integrated" neighborhoods which facilitate integration of the ongoing stream of immigrants and mitigating, if not fully eliminating, tensions between different immigrant cohorts.

An extremely positive contribution to maintenance of this sort of socially integrated neighborhood, in addition to permissive housing regulation, for example, is a city-administered county program providing low-income home owners, low-cost loans for housing repair and upgrade. The City of Parlier's own creative and proactive

[3] A chronic dilemna faced by migrant legal services providers has been to assist farmworkers in securing safe, clean, decent, without closing down all the available housing in agricultural areas, since virtually all is technically out of compliance in some regard. Most have favored pressures on landlords to bring their property up to code rather than enforcement (i.e. abatment).

contribution to efforts to upgrade existing housing stock is a summer program in which Redevelopment Agency funds are used to hire youth to paint elderly residents' homes (with eligibility for this employment being linked to achieving adequate educational success – a 2.0 average).

It is important to recognize what the economic and social consequences of this positive permissiveness are—at least in terms of magnitude. The Parlier Health Survey (Sherman et al, 1997) indicates that 15-20% of Parlier's population may consist of persons living in "back houses", semi-concealed secondary housing units. While not all "back houses" have transnational migrants living in them, there are also transnational migrants living in "front houses" in some cases also. This suggests that Parlier may actually house (outside of the state migrant camp) somewhere in the order of 2,000-4,000 seasonal migrant residents who remain in the area for an average of perhaps eight months a year. Given rental rates or "contributions" by Mexico-based relatives in extended family networks of about $30 per week, these underground housing enterprises probably generate more than $ 4 million in income for the older, more settled families who house these migrants.[4] This income an important factor in Parlier's economic life. Given that the CARUCOM census-based data show Parlier residents to have had an aggregate earned income of about $35 million in 1989, income from renting housing to transnational migrants probably makes up at least 10% of residents' total income. This revenue serves, to some extent, to provide support for an aging population of former farmworkers who, due to anti-immigrant policies and exploitative labor practices (i.e. payment off the books) find themselves falling through gaping holes in a Social Security/retirement "safety net".

What can be learned in this regard from Parlier seems significant in terms of implications for 21st century social policy vis-à-vis immigrants and immigration policy. Parlier's "kinder and gentler" approach to housing regulation seems to have responded appropriately to powerful forces seeking extremely low-cost housing for migrant workers

[4] That is $30/week x 48 weeks x 3,000 persons

– the agricultural industry, migrants themselves, local landlords. Parlier has sought to "nudge" rather than bludgeon landlords into providing adequate quality housing. While the availability of low-cost housing which workers pay for themselves should not be used as an apology for the agricultural industry's deliberate strategy of externalizing the costs of labor, at least the rental revenue from renting to transnational migrants provides a modicum of support to a population of economically disadvantaged landlords. While the quality of "back house" housing provided to transnational migrants in Parlier ranges from shockingly sub-standard (e.g. fifteen men living in a garage or twenty men camped in a backyard) to adequate, housing quality and neighborhood tenor in Parlier, nonetheless, is markedly better than in many communities which seem equivalent in terms of "official" economic and demographic characteristics..

Our research in the Florida farm labor market, which contrasts sharply with the Parlier experience, suggests that there may be additional far-reaching social benefits to an immigrant integration policy which tacitly supports the continued functioning of the extended family and village networks which continue to send transnational migrants north to work in U.S. agriculture. In Florida the Texas-based Mexican-American migrant farmworkers who had already achieved a measure of "social distance" from the extended family and village networks to which they were originally affiliated were prepared to make a radical shift in their labor recruitment and management practices – a paradigm shift I refer to as "the shift from mutualism to merchandising".[5] Where a generation of Mexican-born *troqueros* usually saw their role as bona fide "crewleaders" bound by ties of reciprocal obligation to their work crews, their Texas and Florida-born *troquero* children came to see their role simply as "merchants of labor", maximizing their earnings by driving worker wages as low as possible (since the amount growers were willing to pay for labor were not in their control).

[5] Ed Kissam, "From Mutualism to Merchandising", presentation to the American Anthropology Association, December, 1994.

This rapid transformation from mutual support to exploitation of recently-arrived immigrants by earlier waves of immigrants is, I believe a real danger of social policy unless ways are found to maintain and even to nurture a sense of cultural and social continuity. Gross macro-level analyses of community structure based only on proportion of persons of "Hispanic origin" do a real disservice in distracting policymakers and planners from the heterogeneity of the Latino population in California and the real challenges of managing and stabilizing the process of immigrant integration over multiple generations. Without such attention, there is ample evidence that immigrants will be integrated into California and U.S. society, but not into the mainstream but, instead, into an exploited underclass.

Parlier has done well, not as well as it could perhaps, but better than most farm labor communities in the nation in minimizing the tensions between different generations of immigrants. Explicit attention to this concern, not just in the current indirect context of how housing policy has linkages to social attitudes, but also in the context of education policy and advocacy of immigration policies which seek "managed gradual immigration" rather than the current duplicity of unlimited levels of unauthorized immigration which results in an underclass of workers legally disadvantaged by their unsanctioned immigration status.

3. The Shift In Priority from Provision of Housing to Economic Development

Over the past several years, there has been a shift in local government priorities in Parlier – from a primary emphasis on affordable housing to economic development. This shift in local government priorities should, of course, be seen as almost inevitable, given the multi-generational dynamics of immigrant integration into California society.

Our conclusion in the Farm Labor Supply Study was consistent with that of almost all other farm labor researchers in that we found many Mexican-born farmworkers quite willing to remain in agriculture, ideally working their way out of seasonal unemployment by way of career movement into the "core" labor force of their employers

or into work as mayordomos or farm labor contractors. Just as consistently their U.S.-born Mexican-American children were disinterested in working in farmwork – at least as field workers. Also, of course, the pyramid of farm labor demand where there is perhaps only 1 supervisory job for each 20 seasonal harvest jobs means that, for most farmworkers who live year-round in the United States, alternative employment outside of fieldwork becomes necessary over time. Thus, the shift toward jobs creation as an objective is inevitable, in part because in Parlier (and some of the other Eastside San Joaquin Valley communities) teenagers do not all seem to want to leave town but do want to have employment in the mainstream labor market.

Parlier's pursuit of economic development is, in many respects, not very different than efforts by local municipalities in rural areas throughout the United States. While I am not qualified to assess its relative success, there are clear-cut changes from a decade ago. The new R&N supermarket and plaza, along with a Burger King, are believed to generate perhaps 200-225 jobs. The Kearney Center itself is expected to eventually generate even more jobs – I was told 250-500 (although it is not clear how many would necessarily go to local residents). My understanding is that efforts are underway to increase the number of jobs that Maxco, a box factory, has in Parlier, to secure Dow Manufacturing's expansion of production of insulation-blowing equipment, and ultimately to secure some manufacturing jobs from the Silicon Valley electronics industry. Parlier's contributions to this effort can include streamlined permitting, infrastructure development, and establishing appropriate zoning.

The priority given to economic development and jobs creation has some secondary consequences in terms of local policy and priorities. For example, one rationale for making new, affordable housing available in Parlier has been that population growth and quality of community life and infrastructure are prime concerns of businesses considering whether or not they should locate in town. By the same token, the priority given to having a Parlier Police Department (instead of the contract with Fresno County for sheriff's services which was in place in 1990) stems not only from constituents' demand for police services but from the desirability of a local police department in terms

of marketing Parlier to potential business employers. Finally, the focus on economic development and jobs creation has underscored Parlier city government's awareness that it is a stakeholder in the local educational system. As a community of immigrants, Parlier can easily market itself as a community of people who want to work. However, Parlier must also market itself as a community with a skilled workforce.

While Parlier's strategic plan considers economic development to be a central goal, it seems to be exemplary in recognizing that multiple strands enter into successful community development and that quality of life must be balanced with economic development for the community to prosper.[6] Thus, Parlier's economic development strategy sees "balanced" development, including attention to recreation, leisure time pursuits, and crime-free community life as essential ingredients to economic development as well as outcomes of it. The same strategic plan is insightful in seeing some relatively intangible dimensions of community life (e.g. "small town" atmosphere, citizens "pulling together", family orientation) as resources. There appears to be a consensus among city management and elected officials that aggressive but balanced economic development is worth working hard for and to assuming leadership (e.g. by pursuing and promoting a "Buy Local" campaign) in order to move Parlier toward the "immigrant enclave" end of spectrum and away from the "exploited colonia" pole.

The most immediate outcome of Parlier's prioritization of economic development is an innovative initiative in which Parlier has joined with Fowler, Reedley, Sanger, and Selma to create a "5 Cities Economic Development Joint Powers Agreement". This JPA will allow the new entity to issue industrial development bonds for infrastructure development, market their communities, secure the benefits of designation as a State Enterprise Zone (making state tax credits available to businesses) and, perhaps eventually, as a Federal Empowerment Zone (making federal tax credits available to businesses locating in the area).

[6] References to the Parlier Strategic Plan are based on a powerpoint presentation developed by City Manager Michael Swigart. One graphic shows "quality of life" and "economic development" as dual forces contributing to a sphere of "prosperity".

It is premature to tell whether or not Parlier's local initiatives to spur jobs creation will be successful. What deserves note is that by achieving a consensus regarding at least the broad outlines of a community development strategy, it has been possible to articulate and begin to implement a proactive strategy which is, in fact, responsive to the specific needs of Parlier's immigrant population. In terms of its implications for clarifying state and national immigrant policy dialogue it is useful to note that the priorities relate not to provision of public assistance but, rather, to catalyzing immigrant economic self-sufficiency.[7] It also deserves note that in this arena there appears to be a fair degree of collaboration between local, county, and state government.[8] Parlier city officials were pleased with county acquiescence in its efforts to expand its sphere of influence in order to make development possible south of Manning Ave, as well as with USDA's generally helpful efforts in rural development.

However, in this arena, as in the area of housing development, the essential element in developing promising strategies to overcome the problems of "poverty amid prosperity" has been pro-active local action. By explicitly recognizing the potential trade-offs between economic development and quality of life, Parlier has wisely chosen to highlight traditional values – family life, cooperation – which serve to build on immigrants' non-economic resources. Despite its indisputably high level of poverty, Parlier, in fact, does seem to be have been very successful in remaining a "nice", relatively quiet, family-oriented town, a community in the traditional mold of rural America, except that it is a Latino rural America.

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[7] However, it should be recognized that the development of the local health clinic, operated by United Health Centers of the San Joaquin Valley plays an important role in providing health services which are in many policy contexts lumped in the "public assistance" category. Historically, the development of California's rural primary health care delivery system was, also, the result of advocacy by Latino activists at a state and regional level. For historical antecedents, see the 1970 "California Raza Health Plan".

[8] Certainly a sympathetic Latino presence on the Fresno County Board of Supervisors due to Supervisor Juan Arambula's serving as Board Chair is believed to be relevant. It is not clear that even if Latino-governed municipalities were to secure an equally strong local consensus regarding development, that they might fare as well in other counties of California.

4. The Problem of Education and Labor Force Skills Development

The most immediate and straightforward difficulty faced by Parlier has to do with the fact that it does not have resources to provide the sort of "customized" employment training which might best be part of an integrated jobs creation strategy. Despite the widespread assumption that current employment training policy is "local", the structure of JTPA governance (via Private Industry Councils) is not necessarily optimal for linking local municipalities' economic development initiatives with county-level labor market investments. The main Fresno County skills training providers are in Fresno and Clovis, making it very difficult for Parlier residents, particularly women involved in welfare-to-work transitions, to attend training since there is no public transportation and no local training facility. While the structural and political constraints faced are real, here too, Parlier's strategy points to the value of proactive efforts and a willingness to collaborate. The City Manager has also received commitments from the local community college, Reedley College, to develop skills training "customized" to meet the needs of any new businesses which might relocate in town.[9] Clearly, as a matter of federal and state policy, meaningful requirements for assuring equitable access to limited employment training resources (estimated as meeting less than 5% of actual need) would help small, rural communities such as Parlier. Meanwhile, one medium-term prospect is that the newly-formed Economic Development JPA may give the five-city consortium the leverage to secure employment training programs in their area.

However, there is one glaring structural problem underlying city government efforts to carry out its economic development agenda – namely, the statutory independence of local city government and local education authority. This is a problem which is not unique to Parlier but it is a problem which is serious for Parlier. As several researchers and policy analysts have observed (Rumbaut and Cornelius,1995) such

[9] This sort of "customized" skills training, built upon techniques developed in the context of onsite workforce development programs are a key element of California's strategy for preparing educationally disadvantaged adults for 21st century employment. For a review of issues and prospects, see Ed Kissam, Jo Ann Intili, and Bernadette Dawson, "California's State Plan for Workplace Skills Development", Adult

problems are particularly critical in areas of California which are predominantly immigrant but endemic throughout the state

Because local government is held accountable politically for economic development it has a strong vested interest in the local school system's development of solid "high-performance" skills to assure local high school graduates will be able to meet new businesses' skill demands. Yet local educational agencies in California and in the nation have seldom been held accountable in terms of performance outcomes. K-12 educators, rather than providing intellectual leadership as to what constitutes 21st century information-handling skills have consistently looked back toward 19th century mass-production models for "creating knowledge" and efforts to assure quality educational services. One of the problems is that the labor market is, in many respects, now a global one, although local variations are still important.

Parlier's immigrant youth have some advantages for competing in such a labor market. They are bilingual and bicultural, providing them a solid basis for working effectively in an increasingly diverse workforce. Their parents' culture is one which stresses hard work, motivation, entrepreneurship, and collaboration. Both from a social science research perspective and from the perspective of local residents, there is reason for concern about the pathways for integration available to Parlier's youth. Will education provide a pathway to upward career mobility, employment stability and a settled family life or will youth become involved in gangs and be tracked into the most unstable sectors of the U.S. labor market? Increasingly, there is recognition that there are serious problems in preserving the initial advantages accruing to immigrant and other disadvantaged children from highly-effective pre-school programs such as Headstart, particularly as the children move from elementary to secondary school.[10]

Education Institute for Research and Planning report to the California Department of Education and California Community Colleges, March 1995.

While I have not had an opportunity to objectively assess the actual quality of education services provided in the Parlier Unified School district, the prospects do not seem very appealing, even though the district board, like local government, is controlled by local Latino residents. When I talked to high school counseling staff in 1995, the high school completion rate was only 58% and most of the students who graduated were only going on to community college. This is consistent with the valley-wide problems of educational quality Elias Lopez reported on at the 1995 Asilomar conference.

The challenges standing in the way of proactive movement toward genuine educational reform are formidable but they stem in part from the reality that K-12 education is, in many respects, controlled by state regulations, not by local school boards which tend to become preoccupied with the rituals of governance or "bricks and mortar" issues and distracted from the difficulties of articulating a truly ambitious agenda of educational reform. The one tangible indicator of progress has been construction of a new junior high school which has reportedly alleviated crowding. Moreover, in a community such as Parlier, where the school system represents such an important source of jobs for local residents, there tends, inevitably, to be a very heavy preoccupation with personnel issues and process in competition with an emphasis on educational outcomes and "whatever it takes" to achieve these outcomes (the basis for the charter school movement).

On my latest visit to Parlier this year, I heard that the Parlier school board had recently turned down a proposed public-private partnership oriented toward building students' skills with information technology. Such a negative attitude toward collaboration with the private sector, while not uncommon among schools, is problematic from the perspective of jobs creation/economic development strategy since building such skills are a foundation for the kind of versatile acquisition of information, analytic

[10] A discussion of these issues can be found in Ed Kissam, Anne Steirman, and Jorge Nakamoto, "A Descriptive Study of the Families Served by Migrant Head Start", Final Report submitted to the Head Start Bureau, Administration on Children, Families, and Youth, HHS, April, 1998.

thinking, problem-solving, teamwork, and understanding of systems needed for the "high performance" workplace.

There are, happily, some positive developments. In discussions during this same visit to Parlier (August, 1998) a candidate for the November, 1998 school board election pointed to the need to increase counseling services for high school students. This is an appropriate concern, given the fact that career trajectories are increasingly complex in the 21st century and this is an area where immigrant parents are not prepared to provide their children much guidance (since career pathways in Mexico are quite different than in the U.S.) Progress in this area would be valuable and provides many opportunities for collaboration between the schools, city government, and local business. The sense in town is that the new District Superintendent is committed to working collaboratively with local government in win-win efforts to improve local education. Parlier's mayor is interested in aggressively pursuing proactive collaborations in education such as, for example, working to set up off-site computer-based learning programs for youth, adult learning programs for adults which might, for example, be located in a low-income housing complex.

Despite local control, Parlier, unfortunately does not seem to have escaped the national problem of educators and administrators who seem unable to grasp what the economy or civic institutions need schools to achieve in educating youth.[11] From the perspective of at least some observers, there is hope that in 1998 the Parlier schools will move to work more collaboratively and aggressively to prepare students with the skills needed by employers, thereby contributing to an "integrated" and coordinated pro-immigrant policy.

[11] The Secretary's Commission on Achieving the Necessary Skills (SCANS) developed a solid conceptual framework in the early 1990's for a paradigm shift in workforce preparation but, despite efforts by the University of Pittsburgh, the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics, the American Association for the Advancement of Science, and others, K-12 education reform is moving extremely slowly and awkwardly to address the rapidly escalating demands on an information-based society.

Ironically, the threats posed to immigrant students by passage of Proposition 187 and 227 may well be the impetus needed to engage immigrant parents in the issues of school governance which many have ignored, in part due to lack of self-confidence in their ability to contribute meaningfully to efforts in which educators are seen as "experts". In Parlier, as in other areas of the state there is interest in the possibility of seeking, on a class-by-class basis, waivers from the English-only provisions of Proposition 227. Just as Proposition 187 and the PRWORA welfare reform legislation have resulted in a backlash against their proponents when immigrants who were legal permanent residents hastened to naturalize and, subsequently, to register to vote, and, then, to actually vote, Proposition 227 may actually catalyze grassroots involvement by Latino parents in demanding educational quality for their children. Ideally such involvement might, in a parallel to developments in local city governance, give rise to an aggressive and proactive agenda to craft quality educational services which respond to the specific "mix" of services tailored to meet the educational needs of Parlier elementary and secondary school students.

5. Civic Involvement—How Much, How Soon?

Where, perhaps, Parlier might possibly differ from traditional communities in rural America is that local residents might have a basis to decide that local civic involvement serves more than a ritual function as demonstration of good citizenship. But it is not yet clear whether or not Parlier, and by implication other demographically and socioeconomically similar communities in the San Joaquin Valley, will differ much from "mainstream" communities in this regard. Analysis of local election data from 1996 and 1998 (the first years when the most of the IRCA bulge of permanent legal residents could have become naturalized citizens and begun to vote) may provide some trend data on this. However, given INS naturalization backlogs, no solid conclusions will be possible until the 2000 election, when the tremendous backlog of current citizenship applicants will (hopefully) have been processed and when the presidential elections provide a draw for new voters.

According to local observers, there is not yet a high level of direct civic involvement in Parlier. What does exist is a growing sense of one's rights as a consumer of local government services. In interpreting this evolution of civic involvement, it is useful to remember that participatory democracy was initially designed for communities the size of Parlier. With somewhere in the order of 2,500 households, each of Parlier's four district council members is accountable to perhaps 600 households while the mayor (who is elected in an at-large community-wide district) is accountable to all. Because of the small size of the community, elected representatives are easily accessible. Given this situation, it has not been surprising to hear that constituents are quite willing to call up a local council person to express their opinion, ask for help in resolving a problem, or to complain about the services they are receiving. The fact that Parlier's city council and city employees are easily accessible, coupled with their involvement in pursuing an active pro-immigrant agenda, is likely to eventually generate higher levels of involvement. However, this strand of community development, systematic efforts to increase levels of civic participation, has not yet been actively pursued to my knowledge.

Mexican traditions of *caciquismo* and monolithic domination of Mexican political life by the PRI until the mid-1990's, in combination with the power of family and network allegiances, have also probably slowed the development of high levels of direct civic involvement in local government in Parlier. This is likely to change, in part due to Mexican immigrants having been spurred into political engagement by the extreme anti-immigrant actions of California Republicans, in part due to the fact that there is now a "second generation" city council, after the initial 1972 "revolution" in city governance, and in part due to increasing levels of educational attainment, English-language literacy, and a constantly-growing proportion of U.S.-born or naturalized citizens. Another factor hindering civic involvement which has been mentioned is that some residents may have become complacent, given the victory of having achieved an all-Latino City Council.

The approach taken by Parlier city government to encourage civic participation, while not innovative, represents a sound approach to building civic involvement. The City Council has set up at least three citizens' advisory committees, a Budget Advisory

Committee, a General Plan Advisory Committee, and a "Blue Ribbon" Advisory Committee charged with considering fiscal policy options for increasing city revenues. These are seen as part of gradual, across-the-board efforts to build higher levels of involvement.

This is an area where federal and state policy might, in fact, greatly benefit from adopting a proactive stance. While immigration policy has always had elements nominally designed to promote new immigrants' civic involvement – i.e. the 40 hours of ESL/Civics involvement under IRCA, the 100 questions for naturalization – immigration policy has never seriously considered how it might be possible to genuinely promote active civic involvement by either residents or new citizens. Adult education programs charged with providing citizenship preparation classes -- in the K-12 system, community colleges, and community-based organizations – have all been derelict in doing little more than "teaching to the test" (i.e. the trivial but arcane INS 100 questions).[12] While all profess a deep commitment to immigrant "empowerment", actual efforts in this area are few and far between.[13]

In this arena, where local, state, and federal government are concerned stakeholders along with educational institutions and the non-profit sector, it would be wise to carefully consider how collaborative efforts might contribute to building civic involvement and how such involvement might contribute to immigrants' ability to move proactively to integrate themselves into the mainstream of California society. While the Irvine Foundation's Central Valley Partnership has promise in defining what roles the non-profit sector can effectively play, there is not yet much evidence of active

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[12] I present a conceptual framework for this effort in E. Kissam, "Reinventing Citizenship Instruction", Inter-American Institue on Migration and Labor, 1993. An immigrant issues curriculum with more detailed guidance on instuctional strategies can be found in Ed Kissam and Holda Dorsey, **Tierra De Oportunidad**, Latino Adult Education Services project, Hacienda La Puente School District, 1997.

[13] The Irvine Foundation has, however, since 1996, been funding a network of pro-immigrant community-based organizations, the Central Valley Partnership, to provide naturalization services to immigrants while, at the same time, working to build genuine civic involvement. My ability to focus on the issue of local civic involvement in Parlier stems in part from our efforts to develop a "baseline" for assessing the success of this very promising initiative.

engagement by the public sector in actively promoting civic involvement, despite rhetorical support for such efforts.

What the tangible benefits of such involvement might be need to be examined quite carefully but Parlier's experience suggests that there is some merit to the notion that local involvement can make a difference even when the agenda is not one filled with ideological and policy divisions. What is fairly clear is that active investment is needed to build political participation in economically disadvantaged communities in which the bulk of the population consists of working poor.[14]

6. Local Fiscal Policy

Parlier is a "full service" municipality. The City's annual budget is about $5 million. Approximately $2.5 million of the city revenue stems from user fees for city services – water, sewer, and garbage collection. General fund revenues come from property tax and 1 cent of the 7.5 cents per dollar in sales tax on local transactions. Not surprisingly, fiscal issues are a constant concern because it is very difficult to carry out all the basic functions of local government at this budget level.[15] An important consideration, from the perspective of local government, in pursuing a strategy of local economic development is that increased levels of local business transaction will generate tax revenue for the city. Clearly, further housing development will also generate revenue, but housing development is seen as generating even more demand for services than local business development.

In this realm, the issues at play are very similar to those faced by mainstream communities. Parlier's operation of its own Police Department is costly but is seen as a matter of civic pride as well as practicality. From city government's perspective, what is

[14] Henry Brady, Sindey Verba, and Kay Lehman Schlozman, "Beyond SES: A Resource Model of Political Participation", American Political Science Review, June, 1995.

at stake in terms of balancing its budget is whether it can maintain its own Police Department or whether it will need to return to contracted services from the Fresno County sheriff. The City Council placed a utility tax initiative on the ballot for June, 1998. This 4% tax was expected to generate about $200,000. This initiative was voted down, securing only a 53% "yes" vote, because it needed, as a special tax, to secure at two-thirds majority. It will be on the ballot again in the November, 1998 election with revenues not being earmarked for the Police Department but for the General Fund. It is hoped that it can secure the same level of support as it did in June and, thus, pass.

The fiscal constraints faced by Parlier parallel those faced by other municipalities – difficulties in paying for local services, given low property values and low levels of local business activity. This is, of course, a clear-cut example of how California labor-intensive agriculture, while generating the need for local government services successfully externalizes production costs as described in **Poverty Amidst Prosperity**. Even unaccompanied men who are transnational migrants use municipal water, sewer, and garbage collection services. As Parlier's population of U.S.-born second and third-generation children of immigrants become the dominant force in the community, appreciation of agriculture as a source of employment will continue to decrease and there will probably be increasing demand for annexation of agricultural land, public concern about the inequities of tax breaks designed to encourage land being maintained in agricultural production. California agriculture's ability to sustain the many tax breaks it currently enjoys based on the romantic mythology of the public benefits of supporting "family farms" will erode, although the industry's ability to contribute heavily to political campaigns will presumably maintain its ability to continue to receive favorable treatment in the short to medium-term.

[15] At this level of budget, even the basic administrative staff support for local governance – a City Manager, Treasurer, Public Works Superintendent, Planning Technician, and Police Chief – are significant.

Summary Conclusions and Issues for Further Consideration

Parlier provides a good example of the role which local government can play in immigrant integration. Because Parlier is a "mature" immigrant community, it provides a way to look at some aspects of the issues faced integrating immigrants into the mainstream political, economic, and social life of rural California. Immigrant integration policy must be understood to refer not simply to federal or state policy but to the full range of interactions among statutes, regulations, program funding, and prevailing practices at each of these levels of government.

Perhaps the most exciting lesson to be drawn from Parlier's experience is that political control of a local municipality by immigrants and their children can provide the foundation for systematic, rational efforts to smooth and support immigrants' integration into California society. A corollary is that the success of such efforts rests heavily on community development strategies which are oriented toward collaboration and which, like all political efforts, use both "horizontal" and "vertical" networks to leverage desired results.

"Home rule" where Latino residents govern their own communities can make importance differences not only in perceived quality of community life but in objective ways – as evidenced by Parlier's spectacular success in building low-income housing. In a sense, "home rule" provides a way to actually mobilize the resources represented by extended family and village networks and translate a form of "social capital" to which immigrants have easy access into actual economic benefits. The community's commitment to strategic planning, to efforts to increase civic involvement, and to interagency and public-private collaboration are also strategies, which virtually any community with the political will can afford.

Parlier's experience as an extremely poor community which has maintained a pro-immigrant stance and succeeded in sustaining a relatively high quality of family and community life highlights the dangers of alternative strategies such as the anti-immigrant

efforts used by native-born groups and their representatives in Orange County and other areas of Southern California to preserve their relative advantages over immigrants. Escalating tensions in such divided communities will make it increasingly difficult to work collaboratively and productively to address common issues. Robert Bach's prescient call for local efforts to find common ground among immigrants and native-born populations in working together on common concerns – both to solve problems and to build a foundation for positive inter-ethnic relations – is one which many communities in California are ignoring at their own risk.

Parlier appears likely to have substantial success in minimizing the tensions which, in future years, will tend to divide different cohorts of immigrants— in part because of its de facto policy of maintaining integrated neighborhoods in which Mexican-American families and transnational migrants live side-by-side, in part because even when class and immigration status separates groups, ethnic/racial homogeneity does help in minimizing differences. As Parlier moves to "re-diversify" its community, it will be interesting to see what problems will need to be addressed in integrating newly-arrived non-immigrants into an immigrant-dominated community.

Parlier's community experience, while good, shows that not all problems can be easily or successfully overcome. Progress in narrowing the educational gap which separates Mexican immigrants and their children from more advantaged groups in California does not seem to have been very good. The difficulties of mounting effective welfare-to-work programs in rural communities are daunting. Nonetheless, the future is promising in that Parlier city government's willingness to collaborate with the local K-12 system, with the local community college, with neighboring communities in the 5-city economic development JPA mean that there is hope of some movement although it is difficult to predict what the payoff will eventually be.

Structural problems stemming from the "bureaucratization of government" can be expected to continue to plague American public life. This means that a great deal of energy, commitment, and creativity will be required to mount local initiatives toward

some form of integrated community development in which investments in education, infrastructure, and social services are coordinated and "customized" to respond to the needs of their customers, in this case multiple generations of immigrants. But Parlier seems to have escaped some of the worst nightmares where federal, state, county, and local entities compete and jostle for relative advantage in maintaining their own turf.

Conceivably, top-down pressures from the Government Performance Results Act (GPRA) to reorient bureaucracies toward their customers may make it somewhat easier to engage in inter-agency collaboration. Nonetheless, immigrant communities such as Parlier will continue to be threatened by "one size fits all", cookie-cutter policies developed at the federal, state, or county level. Although there has been extensive talk of "devolution" of a variety of programs to local control, this seldom means truly "local" control (usually authority devolves only to the state level).

The research community represented in the ongoing series of "Changing Face of Rural California" conferences should consider carefully how their expertise and efforts can:

a) move toward better descriptions and analyses of the dynamic processes by which immigrants are, in fact, integrated into the mainstream of California society; the roles played by different institutions in this process; and

b) work diligently to determine what sorts of efforts can best contribute to the immediate task of articulating systematic and rational proactive strategies to hasten and smooth the inevitable process of immigrants' integration into California society

Such research has the promise of providing insight into priorities for pro-immigrant policy and planning efforts. It can also provide new understanding of how different sorts of initiatives may interact. For example, a recognition that immigrant families' access to housing is an important strand of immigrant integration policy seems, almost inevitably,

to support innovative strategies to ease access to adult education services, to foster family literacy and encourage civic involvement (for example, via “block” pot lucks to discuss local issues).

The key challenge is, however, to assure that whatever applied policy research efforts go forward are not reductionistic, collapsing the rich panorama of community life into the highly-constrained straitjacket of official data. At a minimum, it will be necessary to keep constantly in sight the central role played by informal social networks in facilitating social and economic interactions in immigrant communities and to seek to find ways to enhance, sustain, and further mobilize such networks in the integration process.